

**RHODE ISLAND MAYORAL ACADEMY<sup>SM</sup>  
BLACKSTONE VALLEY**

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

**MINUTES**

**5:30 p.m., March 22, 2011**

**Blackstone Valley Prep Elementary Cafetorium**

**291 Broad Street, Cumberland**

Mayor McKee called the meeting to order at 5:36 p.m. Present were:

Mayor Daniel J. McKee (Chair)  
John Morton  
Kenneth Vaudreuil

Also present were Executive Director Jeremy Chiappetta, Deputy Executive Director Drew Allsopp, Secretary Daniel C. Waugh, Esquire, Treasurer Michael Magee. Additionally, Jen LoPiccolo, Director of External Affairs for the corporation was present.

Minutes

Mr. Vaudreuil (seconded by Dr. Morton) moved to approve the minutes of the meeting of January 13, 2011. AYE: McKee, Morton, Vaudreuil. NAY: None.

Election of Assistant Secretary

Without objection, the Chair opened consideration of the election of an Assistant Secretary. Dr. Morton (seconded by Mr. Vaudreuil) moved to elect Jen LoPiccolo as Assistant Secretary. AYE: McKee, Morton, Vaudreuil. NAY: None.

Executive Director's Report

Mr. Chiappetta opened with a review of various performance data. For example, attendance in the lower grades is 97%, while attendance in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade is closer to 98%. Charts were distributed showing the DRA2 and STEP assessment results for the kindergarten. Some TERRA NOVA results showing growth in student achievement were also presented. The basic result was that 97% of the kindergartners completed last year ready for first grade. This was especially impressive given, for example, that 82% of the kindergartners started the year below level. Individual class sizes increased in the current year over the prior year by about 40%. Despite this, there was no loss in math performance and a substantial gain in literacy performance, measured January to January (applies to kindergarten only, because the school had only kindergarten scholars in the prior year). STEP data shows that the literacy gains students

made over the August to March period were similar over the two years. Although 87% of the class entered below STEP 1 in August, by March 91% of the class performed at or above STEP 3. Other data showed similarly impressive results. Fifth grade performance also showed substantial gains relative to the Fountas & Pinnell Literacy Assessment benchmarks over the period from August to December. More data detailing the 5<sup>th</sup> grade results were also distributed; these data had been compiled by Ms. Birdsell. Although the academic data results are generally impressive, that is not the reason they are collected. The primary use of the academic data is to guide the teaching program.

Another important assessment is a parental one: intent to return. A parental survey showed intent that over 90% of the students will return without reservations. Some parents did express reservations. Reservations included the length of the day and the desire for more classes such as art, music, and foreign language. The school is planning to include more of these types of classes as the school grows and the scale becomes feasible. The fact that parents were unaware of these plans shows a need for better communication by the school.

Some families continue to have transportation issues that the school is working to resolve.

In regard to staffing for next year, the school appears to be in a strong position, having received over 1,000 applications for open positions. The school has also advertised to fill the positions of operations director and operations associate, and the school has received applications from many strong candidates for those positions. The branding change accomplished over the December-January period does not appear to have had an adverse impact on teaching and leadership applications.

The branding change also has not affected community appeal. The school received well over 800 applications for next year (compared to this year's 550). At RIDE's request, the school stopped collecting applications a month-and-a-half early. This is a testament to the families of current students and to Ms. LoPiccolo. A number of get-to-know-the-school events were held, including some in Spanish. Thanks also to the Superintendent of Schools in Central Falls who provided lists of families with students.

The President of Rhode Island College, from its Feinstein School of Education and Human Development, the new Dean and the Assistant Dean toured both campuses of the school. They indicated that they wanted to work with the school on matters such as teacher certification and further training, and, in general to collaborate in making education in Rhode Island better. They also requested that BVP staff work as members of their team on some of the tasks they have undertaken for Race to the Top, such as a training institute for principals and turn-around schools.

The Dean of Providence College's School of Professional Studies (which provides undergraduate and graduate degrees in Education) is also scheduled to visit the school. These visits are opportunities to build bridges with organizations that were given short shrift by prior management. Current management is enthusiastic about collaborating with these organizations.

In response to a question by Dr. Morton, Mr. Chiappetta indicated that the staff would grow by almost 20 positions. All current staff have been invited to return, although there may be some attrition, given how talented the staff is, and also given that some individuals may have reservations about the directions the new management is pursuing. Feedback from the staff does, of course, provide guidance about changes that may be needed.

#### Executive Session--§ 42-46-5(a)(2)—Potential litigation

Dr. Morton (seconded by Mr. Vaudreuil) moved to go into executive session pursuant to § 42-46-5(a)(2) to discuss potential litigation. AYE: McKee, Morton, Vaudreuil. NAY: None.

\* \* \* EXECUTIVE SESSION \* \* \*

Upon return from executive session at 6:24 p.m., Dr. Morton (seconded by Mr. Vaudreuil) moved to seal the minutes of the executive session. AYE: McKee, Vaudreuil, Morton. NAY: None.

Mr. Vaudreuil (seconded by Dr. Morton) moved to return to public session. AYE: McKee, Vaudreuil, Morton. NAY: None.

#### Treasurer's Report

The new school funding formula will have a slight negative budgetary impact during the early transition years that may result in less robust field trips and perhaps less supplies. As the new formula fully phases in, it will have a strongly positive impact.

Budget-to-actual update shows that all areas are operating fiscal responsibility, and the school will end the current year in the black. This is expected to remain true even if some uncertain revenues do not develop.

The Chair warned that the Governor's proposed supplemental budget for the current fiscal year will reduce school revenues in the current fiscal year by an amount in the vicinity of \$68,000 - \$93,000, if the Governor's proposed supplemental budget is adopted. Therefore, the school should not count on those dollars.

#### Audit

The paperwork for the audit to be finalized has been submitted. The audit should be provided within a couple of weeks.

#### Facilities

Currently, the elementary school uses six homerooms in the former St. Patrick's School building's basement floor. The upper floor is mostly used for supplemental space and vacant.

Next year, Ms. Colarusso will have a school on the first floor, and Mr. Chiappetta will have a kindergarten on the first floor. A first and second grade on the first and second floors will fill the school building to capacity. This expansion will put stress on the available parking in the local region of Cumberland; the school will attempt to alleviate this stress by arranging for additional parking from neighboring landowners.

The school is also exploring with an architect the possibility of adding additional office space.

In sum, plans are proceeding to double the number of students in the former St. Patrick's School building in the next year.

The middle school enrollment will also double next year. The school, in conjunction with the Rhode Island Mayoral Academies, is actively reviewing a half-dozen sites for the expanded middle school. The two most likely prospects are (1) an acquisition and development project that would provide flex space for several years and (2) a space sharing arrangement with a public school.

#### Employee handbook

A free-lance consultant offered his services *pro bono* to produce an employee handbook based on a review of a number of charter and private school employee handbooks. A draft has been circulated to staff for their review, with the question, do you want to work in a place that uses this handbook, and, if not, what changes should be made. An employee handbook is an important tool for employee retention and recruitment.

#### Transition memo

The Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education ("RIDE") requested a formal update on how the school is operating in light of the change of management, and requested that the report be provided by March 18. Various RIDE staff members have visited the school, some several times. During those walkthroughs, and in the memo, they have been able to view what is happening with teaching and learning, what is happening with regard to external affairs, what is happening with regard to business and finance, operations, and governance. Much of this material is highlighted on the school's new website, which was developed with the help of a parent. The stability of the school is a testament to the teachers and parents, and, in the Middle School, to Stacey Birdsell's leadership, and to office staff.

#### Public forum

No members of the public asked questions or offered any comments.

### Adjournment

Mr. Vaudreuil (seconded by Dr. Morton) moved to adjourn. AYE: McKee, Morton, Vaudreuil. NAY: None. The Chair declared the meeting adjourned at 6:58 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Daniel C. Waugh  
Secretary